

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A settlement method, comprising:
identifying each of a plurality of service providers operating to provide a service to a user in exchange for a fee debited from an account associated with
5 said user;
apportioning said fee to said identified service providers; and
crediting respective service provider accounts with respective portions of said fee.
- 10 2. The method of claim 1, wherein said step of apportioning is adapted in response to changes in said provided service.
3. The method of claim 1, wherein said service comprises a telecommunications service supported by a plurality of service providers.
4. The method of claim 3, wherein said service includes a bridge service provided by a telecom platform service provider.
- 15 5. The method of claim 4, wherein said service includes a bridge service provided by an internet service provider.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein said service comprises a video-on-demand (VOD) service.
- 20 7. The method of claim 6, wherein said service includes services associated with content request and services associated with content delivery.

8. The method of claim 1, wherein said service comprises one of the delivery of electricity, natural gas and water.

9. The method of claim 8, wherein said delivery service includes services provided by source and distribution service providers.

5 10. The method of claim 1, wherein portions of said fee are debited from respective accounts associated with more than one user.

11. The method of claim 1, wherein said service is provided to a plurality of users, and wherein said service fee is allocated among said plurality of users according to the proportional cost of providing said service to each user.

10 12. The method of claim 1, wherein said service is provided to a plurality of users, and wherein said service fee is allocated among said plurality of users according to a least cost determination based on service level agreements between at least one of said users and said service providers.

15 13. The method of claim 11, wherein at least one of said plurality of users does not contribute to said service fee.

14. The method of claim 1, wherein at least one of said service providers is selected according to a service level agreement (SLA) between said at least one service provider and said user.

20 15. The method of claim 1, wherein said step of apportioning comprises the steps of:

measuring services provided to said user by said service providers; and

determining, for each of said measured services, a portion of said fee associated with said measured services.

16. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
selecting each of said plurality of service providers to provide said service to said user.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein those service providers having service
5 level agreements with said user are selected to provide respective service portions.

18. The method of claim 16, wherein those service providers operating together to provide a lowest total cost for said service are selected.

19. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
10 monitoring said services provided to said user;
determining whether a value of said user account is sufficient to pay a presently accrued fee; and
in the case of said account value being insufficient, terminating said service to said user.

20. The method of claim 19, further comprising:
15 prior to said service termination, offering said user an opportunity to provide additional value such that said provided service may be continued.

21. The method of claim 1, further comprising:
monitoring said services provided to said user;
20 determining whether a value of said user account is sufficient to pay a presently accrued fee; and
in the case of said account value being insufficient, retrieving value from an alternate account associated with said user.

22. A computer readable medium having computer executable instructions for performing steps, comprising:

identifying each of a plurality of service providers operating to provide a service to a user in exchange for a fee debited from an account associated with

5 said user;

apportioning said fee to said identified service providers; and

crediting respective service provider accounts with respective portions of said fee.

23. A system, comprising:

10 a service platform, for providing a service to a customer using a plurality of service providers;

a service measurement and settlement agent (SMSA), for measuring portions of said provided service associated with respective service providers, apportioning a fee to each of said service providers and crediting respective

15 service provider accounts with respective portions of said fee.

24. The system of claim 23, wherein said SMSA operates to select service providers used to provide said service to said customer.

25. The system of claim 24, wherein said SMSA selects those service providers which together provide said service at a lowest cost to said customer.

20 26. The system of claim 24, wherein said SMSA selects service providers based upon payments made to said SMSA.

27. The system of claim 24, wherein said SMSA selects service providers based upon service level agreements between said customer and said selected service providers.